

UNISON HEALTHCARE - BRANCH UPDATE

From: Sara Gorton, UNISON National Secretary - Health

BRIEFING HC-099-17

29 November 2017

NHS pay – UNISON response to Budget

Who needs to know?

- All Health Branches (England) [this information was sent directly to Branch Chairs and Secretaries in England on 22 November]
- Health Branches in rest of UK for information

Summary:

The Government confirms additional funding could be made available for NHS PRB recommendation for 2018/19, but availability of funding is linked to “modernisation” of the pay scale. The Government wishes to seek agreement with NHS trade unions on what that looks like.

UNISON health executive will hold an extraordinary meeting in December to consider whether proposals are substantive enough to warrant entering formal negotiations. UNISON branches and members will be consulted before UNISON agrees any deal.

In full:

Government announces additional funding for NHS pay

In the Budget on 22 November 2017 the Chancellor confirmed additional funding could be made available for NHS pay for 2018/19.

This is a marked change from Government position in previous years, where a 1% absolute cap was announced in advance and artificially constrained each pay round.

However, they have also announced that additional funding will be contingent on agreement with the NHS trade unions on NHS pay ‘modernisation.’ No announcement was made on any detail relating to that.

The Government has also indicated that any ‘pay modernisation’ talks will run in parallel with the Pay Review Body round.

Our stance

Budget day promises are a long way from putting cash in pockets and reversing the impact of 6 years of pay restraint. However we do recognise this is a shift in the Government’s position and a possible light at the end of the tunnel, in response to intense campaigning by UNISON and other trade unions.

In September, UNISON led the other NHS trade unions in submitting a joint claim, for RPI inflation plus £800 for all NHS staff.

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We will be taking that claim to the NHS Pay Review Body (PRB) and talking to them about why a fair pay rise is a good investment for the service and the right thing to do for NHS staff. Any possibility of additional funding that could meet that claim is worth exploring.

But not at any cost. UNISON has been very clear that NHS staff will not foot the bill for their own pay rise and we have very clear policy on defending hard-fought terms and conditions.

However, if 'modernisation' means the Government finally taking our plans for pay reform seriously we want to talk. For over two years we have been clear about our plan for NHS pay:

- reducing the length of time it takes to reach the top of the band
- increasing starting salaries by getting rid of overlaps
- reforming the lowest grades to remove poverty pay from the NHS

Decisions made so far

Unison's lead committee for members in health, the Health Service Group Executive, met on 2 November. There was a lot of speculation on the Budget so a plan was put in place.

It was decided that if additional money was made available in the Budget, with strings attached, UNISON would enter exploratory discussion on the following basis:

- a. Discussions will happen alongside the full Pay Review Body process
- b. Joint union discussions only, using NHS Staff Council Executive structures
- c. The purpose of any discussion will be to pursue our AfC Refresh Priorities (reform of B1-3; remove overlaps; quicker to get to top of band)
- d. We would gain a full understanding of what 'productivity' requirements might be sought by Government/employers in return for positive structural change

At this stage it appears likely that exploratory discussions will take place so an extraordinary meeting of the Executive has been called for December to discuss next steps.

The Executive has a long held position that any proposed deals or reform packages will be put to branches and members for consultation before UNISON reaches agreement.

Provisional timelines

With the information we currently have, including the possible prize of securing money for the 2018/19 pay year, the likely timings are:

November

- initial exploratory talks with joint trade unions to scope employer/government priorities

December

- extraordinary meeting of UNISON's executive to agree whether to enter formal

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- talks
- UNISON and the joint trade unions submit evidence to the NHS Pay Review Body

January - February

- possible formal talks
- UNISON's health executive meets to approve putting any deal to member consultation

March-April

- Full consultation on approving any deal

The NHS PRB usually reports by March, for April implementation, but this timescale looks very tight given how late in the year this announcement is.

Implications for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales

Should a deal be reached, additional funding has been announced for NHS pay in England. This means proportionate additional funding will also be made available to the devolved countries in the usual way. Governments and employers only negotiate on a country-by-country basis.

UNISON's health committee will ensure Chairs of the regional health committees in devolved countries are fully briefed on developments. UNISON retains its policy position that NHS pay in all four countries should 'level up' to the best rate available across the UK.

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